Nonpoint Source Pollution Management Program

January 2011

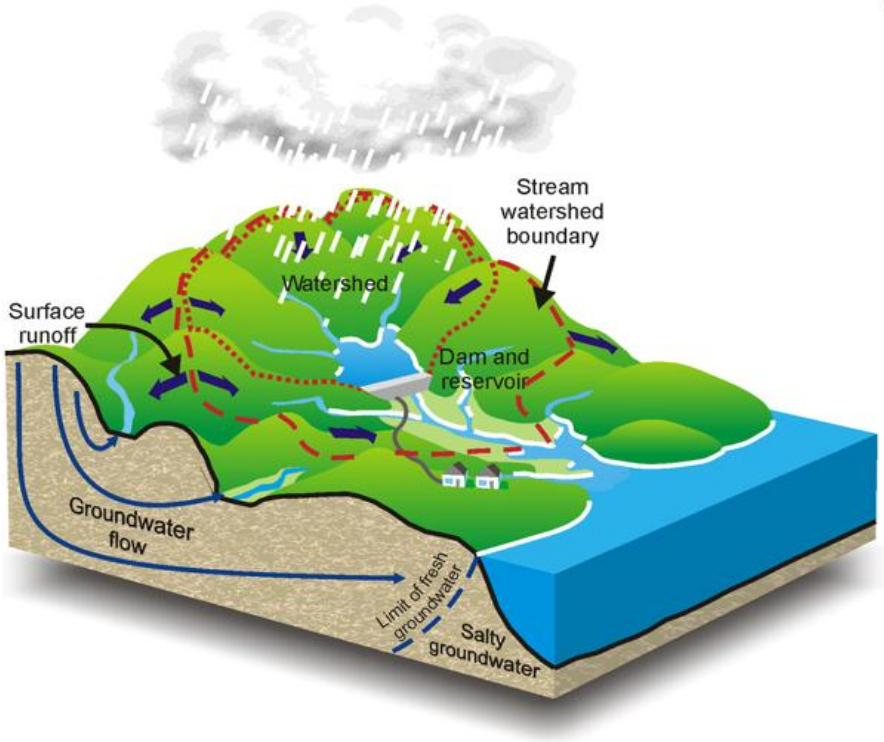
Watershed Basics

Keeping North Dakotaôs lakes and streams clean demands more than dockside diligence. Even if you donôt live along the shores or banks, you may be contributing to the pollution of lakes and streams. Lakes and streams are larger than their shorelines. Theyôre part of a system called a watershed.

What is a watershed?

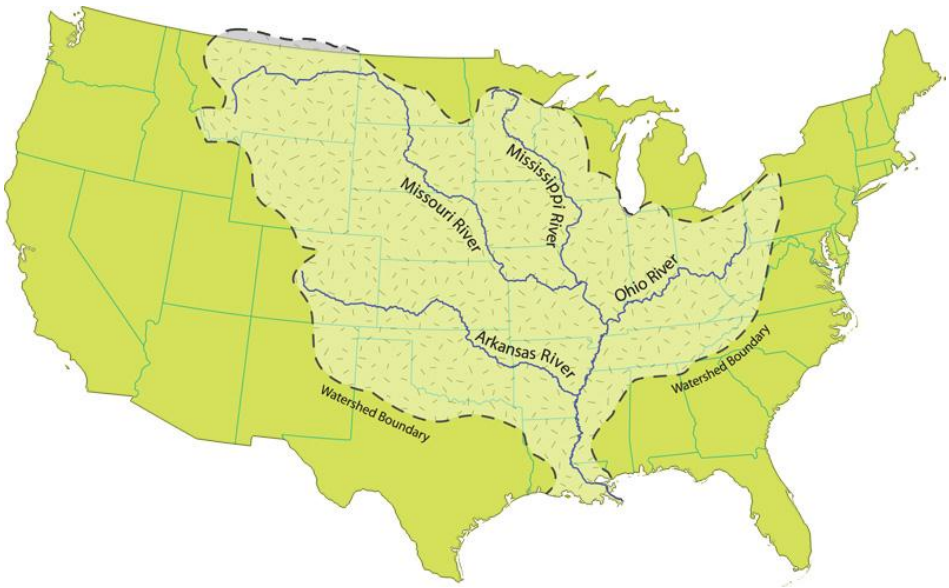
Water from rainfall or snowmelt that doesnôt evaporate or soak into the soil runs into ditches, streams, wetlands, or lakes. The land area from which the water drains is called a watershed.

Watersheds may vary in size. If water from a few acres drains into a little stream, those few acres are its watershed. This stream and others like it run into larger streams or lakes. Small watersheds make up larger ones. Itôs easy to see how the watersheds of North Dakotaôs lakes can have land areas many times larger than their lake surfaces.



How do you fit into your watershed?

Wherever you live in North Dakota you are in a watershed. Your watershed may be covered with towns, industrial areas, or farmland. Any excess nutrients, sediments, and pollutants in your watershed are carried by runoff to surface waters.

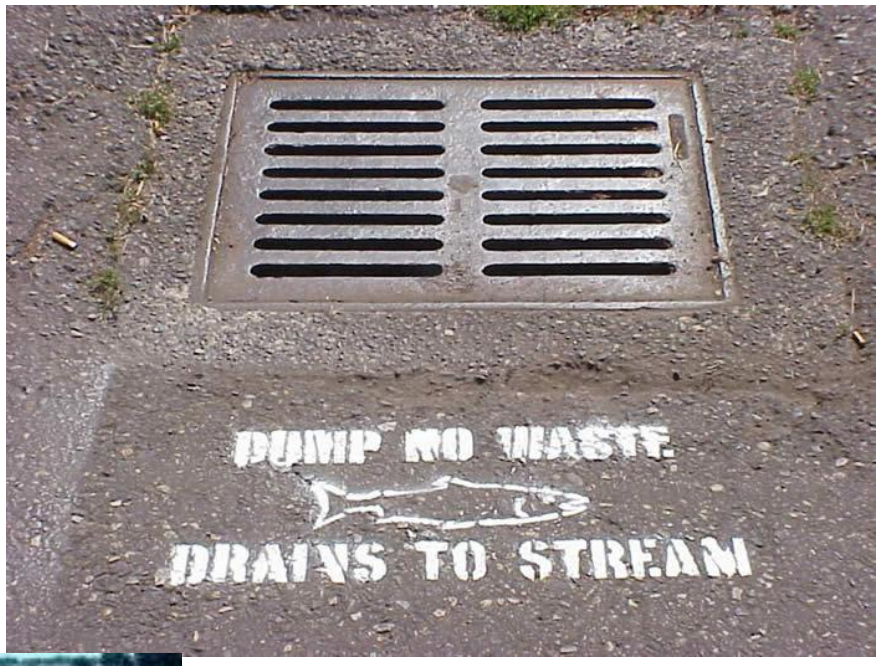


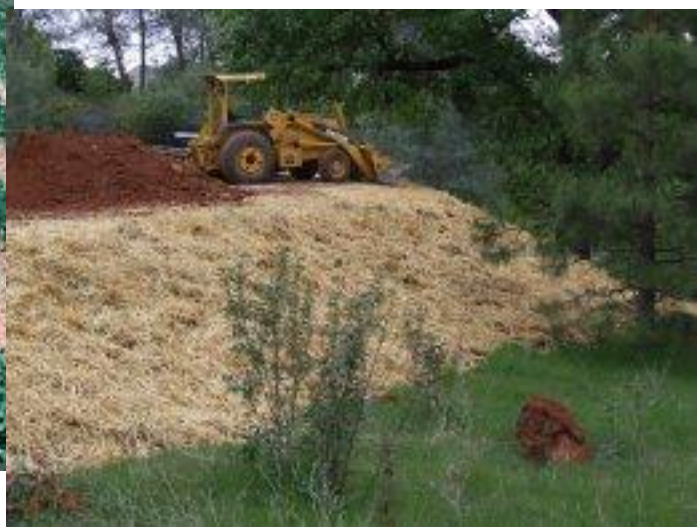
You and the other people who live in the watershed potentially influence the water quality in nearby streams and lakes depending on how careful your are in your day-to-day activities.

Understanding that actions on land affect water quality should lead you to cast a critical eye on many common activities such as, gardening, lawn care, automobile maintenance, farming, and ranching. These and many other activities can contribute excess nutrients, sediment, and pollutants to the surface waters in your watershed.

What can you do for your watershed?

- ☛ Minimize erosion by adopting practices that slow the flow of water over your property.
- ☛ Reduce excess nutrients that could wash off your land.
- ☛ Collect waste oil and other automotive wastes to be recycled, rather than letting them run on to the ground.





In rural areas you can:

< Practice contour farming.
< Use conservation tillage.
< Practice crop rotation.
< Install grassed waterways.
< Plant filter strips around feedlots.
< Retire highly erodible land.
< Practice sound pesticide and fertilizer use.
< Delay tilling and fertilizing until spring.
< Recycle agri-chemical containers.
< Construct diversion dikes or channels around feedlots.
< Recycle fluids from vehicle and machinery.

In urban areas you can:

< Maintain plant cover to reduce runoff.
< Mulch gardens and exposed soil.
< Terrace land to slow runoff.
< Direct runoff to areas where it will soak into the soil.
< Minimize pavement and impermeable surfaces.
< Minimize soil disturbance at construction sites.
< Maintain septic systems.
< Use low- or no-phosphate soaps.
< Recycle automotive fluids.

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